

Ego, be gone

“Today is the first day of the rest of your life” is a line most of us have heard. I also recall a comedian responding: “Yeah, but so was yesterday and you didn’t do anything special then either!”

As we begin a new year we also begin the first year of the rest of our lives. What do we do with 2018?

Many of us are inspired to make resolutions. Yet studies indicate that most are broken within the first 48 hours of the new year. Resolutions seem to work for only a very few. What do the rest of us do?

My suggestion is that we make a resolution not to make any resolutions. In other words, let’s use our willpower to surrender our willpower. When “I” make a resolution, I’m depending on my own power. That’s all about ego. When I let go of making resolutions, I’m letting go of ego. Then it’s all about God.

I was privileged to have the great Scripture scholar, Sulpician Father Raymond Brown, in class at Baltimore’s St. Mary’s Seminary in the 1960s, when it was fashionable to have an “identity crisis.” Everybody who was anybody was questioning, “Who am I?”

Father Brown began one particular lecture on St. Paul with the words: “Gentlemen, St. Paul had many problems. But one of them was not an identity crisis.” He then went on to quote St. Paul, who wrote: “By the grace of God I am what I am.”

The world defines us by our ego. I am what I do. I am what I earn. I am what I own.

When we let go of our ego and our resolutions, then we can become what God wants us to be. Suppose we just “resolved” to let go and let God?

A friend of mine recently told me that her favorite prayer is: “Lord, make me more like you.” Isn’t that a disarming prayer? She’s not asking for anything for her ego. She just wants to be more like Jesus. Or, to quote St. Paul again: “By the grace of God I am what I am.”

Given all the violence and crime in our world, it's clear that we need a Savior. In the fullness of time God took on flesh in the womb of Mary and was born into time. Can we not allow God to take on our flesh and our blood and be born into time through us?

What happens in every Mass, in every eucharistic celebration, is that bread and wine become the presence of God, so that we who feed on them can bring God's presence into the world in our flesh and our blood. At Christmas we celebrate Christ's coming in the fullness of time. In every Eucharist we celebrate God's coming in this moment in time.

So yes, we can make our normal resolutions if we care to. "I'm going to eat less." "I'm going to give up drinking." "I'm going to exercise more." And in two days, those resolutions will likely be broken.

But to resolve to let go of ego resolutions, and to allow God to enter our lives each day of the new year, is to become the presence of God in our world. All we do is to create the space and allow God to do the rest. All we have to do is to let go and let God. God will do the rest. God will be born again in us.